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AUTHOR McPherson, Elisabeth
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ABSTRACT

Junior and community colleges must explode many traditional notions about education in order to fulfill their promises to poor and disadvantaged students. The number of junior and community colleges and the number of students attending them have increased rapidly in the past few years. But many communities think that community colleges didn't keep their promises. Most community college students are poor, and college costs are frequently high. Students frequently cannot get into the job training programs they want because of staff, space and money shortages. To work toward fulfilling community college ideals, ideas about student and teacher roles and about ways of measuring success must be changed. Teachers must help students improve their self concept and gain self confidence, processes which teachers with Ph.D.'s may damage because of a condescending attitude. Good community colleges have stopped using standards based on exclusiveness, a major shift in attitude and procedures, both in curriculum design and in course grading. The CCCC Guidelines recognize the broadened definition of junior college education and the necessity of adapting the training of two-year college English teachers to it. The Guidelines take a stand against racism in training programs but not sexism. Junior colleges are one of the best places to change racist and sexist attitudes because students come there with great faith in education. (KM)

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THE EXPLODING AND EXPLOSIVE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

Elisabeth McPherson

Forest Park Community College

When the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education made its most recent report, it said that the United States doesn't need a single new institution granting doctor's degrees, but that it does need a lot more urban community colleges. What new promise do junior colleges offer, exciting enough or realistic enough, to justify that recommendation?

The question is not easy to answer. For one thing there are a lot of junior colleges. In 1962 there were just over 400; in 1969, the PMLA Directory listed 1,013. It was fashionable to say, two or three years ago, that a new junior college opened somewhere, every week, and although I don't think they are exploding at quite such a rate these days, it seems a safe guess that the 1969 figure is out-of-date. Some of these colleges are private, some public. A few of them are free, a few very expensive. Some of them are inner-city schools, and some are in the middle of wheatfields and deserts and mountains, with the nearest population center a day's drive away. Some enroll 200 students, some 20,000. Some are little more than pale copies of what's offered during the first two years at the nearest state university, with a secretarial course or two thrown in to justify the term "comprehensive." Some of them are ex-technical schools, with a course in humanities added so they can call themselves "community colleges." Some of them have been operating quietly, with a steady, stable student body, for more than half a century, and some of them are so new the doors aren't hung yet when the students line up for registration.

Another reason the question is hard to answer is that not everybody agrees on what community colleges promise to do. The public relations man, writing copy for the college catalog,will probably say that the junior college is "dedicated to the educational needs of the whole community," that it "accepts every student where he is and takes him as far as he can go," that it "recognizes a variety of abilities and objectives and tries to meet all of them." It's true that on any given day you are likely to eat your hamburger at the same table with a pre-law major, an aspiring radiological technician, a Vietnam veteran memorizing the multiplication table, and a local housewife learning to change her own sparkplugs. Most comprehensive junior colleges do offer four programs: technical, transfer, general education (sometimes called "remedial"), and non-credit community service courses in everything from cake decorating to stock market investment. Those phrases about the "whole community," about every student," are promises the community college tries to keep.

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State legislators, on the other hand, see community colleges from a slightly different perspective. The New York legislature recently passed a bill making it mandatory for all community college instructors to teach 15 contact hours, all undergraduate instructors in four-year schools 12, and all graduate professors 9. Governor Rockefeller vetoed the New York bill, but similar requirements in similar proportions are state law in Florida and Tennessee, and perhaps by now in other states I don't know about. At least a few state politicians think the promise of community colleges is cut-rate education--more teaching for less money.

Whether it's state law or not, as recently as three years ago well over half of the country's junior college English teachers were meeting classes for 13-15 hours a week, a nearly a quarter of them had more than 100 composition students.[1] Caught in the present money shortage, more colleges seem to be moving away from the NCTE/National Junior College Committee's workload recommendation of nine hours a week, limited to 50 composition students, than are moving toward it.

What the community college promises English teachers, then, is a good deal of hard work. At least 12 hours of the load will be some kind of freshman composition and there's little chance of being "promoted" out of comp into literature classes, because the proportion of composition to literature will probably remain about six to one. Outside their classes, the teachers will act as academic advisors for anything from 10 to more than 50 students, help get out the college paper or creative writing magazine or annual, coach a play or two, give talks to civic clubs. And none of this counts meetings. Junior college teachers certainly don't perish because they don't publish--and on the other hand, a community college teacher who can plan a text with a fresh and lively attitude toward writing will probably find the publisher's representatives lined up outside the door, fighting for a luncheon date. We have a couple of colleagues who got a contract on the basis of some notes on the back of a cocktail napkin.

Finally, the community that 10 years ago enthusiastically voted a big bond issue for junior college buildings may be out defeating this year's operating levy because some people think the college didn't keep its promises. Those who thought it promised miracles feel it has let them down: things seem to be going along much like always--bad, maybe a little worse. People who saw the college as a kind of law and order device, an end to all that trouble young people make, are probably blaming the college for admitting too many Black students; instead of being grateful, "they" are down there picketing the cafeteria and getting TV coverage for overturning the bookstore shelves. People who thought the junior college did indeed promise a new deal for Black students find the deal isn't very new. Black students are admitted all right, those who can scrape up the tuition, but now the cafeteria is charging them an extra 2¢ for mustard on their hot dogs, the bookstore is refusing their checks, and

the college itself is keeping them out of the medical programs because their scores on those middle class, white-oriented entrance tests are too low; the college is flunking them out of transfer classes because they can't write fluent academic jargon. Black students are in, but they're only half way in. Whatever the community expected, some people are likely to see the local college as going back on its promise.

The college's most important promise, however, is not to the public or the politicians, to the community or the college staff, but to the students. If the college can keep that crucial promise, all the others, except the one about saving money, will automatically be kept too. But before we can judge how well the college is serving the students, we need to know something about who the students are.

In the urban community college I know most about, the students are poor by almost any standard. In the 1970-71 school year, three-fourths of them came from families with incomes of less than $7,000 a year; nearly half, 43%, from families with less than $3,000.[2] Tuition went up a little this year--it's more than $200 a semester for full-time students--and it's hardly surprising that enrollment went down a little. The $200 doesn't cover books, or lunches for those that want to eat, or transportation for those too far off to walk--and almost everybody is. There's a new $15 parking fee, too, and knowing that the extra money goes mainly for financial aid doesn't help much, if you're not getting any, and there certainly isn't enough to go around. When we look at these costs, and these income figures, we can hardly be surprised to find that only 23% of the students get any help from their parents, or that nearly half of them are 22 years old or older--just over 40% of them, more than 4 times the national average.

There are still a lot of things we don't know about these students--how many of them have full-time jobs, for instance, or how many hours a week they work. Common sense tells us, however, that if they're eating, they're working. They're doing everything, from delivering mail to selling pot, from baby-sitting to street-walking. They have to. They're going to college, but they're leading tough lives outside of college, too. The man who compiled these statistics says that in the 3 years he has taught at this college, he's lost 5 students, Black and white, to violent deaths--shootings, rape, murder. That's what I mean by tough lives outside. These students are paying a very high price, comparatively speaking, for their education, and community colleges have a special obligation to see that they get their money's worth. We have to keep the promise the PR man made--that the college will serve the educational needs of the whole community--and the implicit promise made by our entire culture--that education is the only sure, the only possible, way to help the students out of the trap they're in, and make our explosive communities whole.

Let me go back to those statistics for a minute. The same survey showed that 17.8% of the students wanted to be nurses. That's slightly more than 1000 students. But the college nursing program enrolls only 125 students a year--a limit imposed mostly because of staff, space and money. Nursing students are admitted on high school grades, and on those heavily biased standardized tests. Only 17% of the students in that college come from families where either parent had any college education at all, but they do come from the group that knows firsthand about the desparate shortage of medical services. When students inevitably score low on the tests, they take courses to remedy their so-called "deficiencies," but even though they wait and wait, only a handful get in. The catalog description appears to keep the promise, but a real look at real students shows we have a long, long way to go.

It's easy to say, of course, that even though many students don't get the job training they want, they're still getting "an education" of some sort or other. They're certainly enrolled in school, and it's easy to feel scornful, or superior, because their wants are so materialistic, because their main concern is jobs. There's a touch of that scorn in a recent comment quoted in Newsweek: "Most people think kids are concerned about Vietnam, ecology, and marijuana," a voting organizer said. "Not so...The kids who go to junior colleges don't have the same priorities as those who are at places like Berkeley or Stanford. They want jobs and education."[3]

I'd agree with the speaker that junior college students want jobs. So do most of their counterparts in four-year colleges and universities. So, incidentally, do the unemployed Ph.D.'s who have discovered the junior colleges this year. The difference is that very few of the university students, graduate or undergraduate, have lived in families without respectable jobs, without enough food to go around. Our students have. The idealistic university students who find the establishment so intolerable they decide to drop out have something to drop out of. Most inner-city two-year students haven't; you can't drop out of something you've never been in.

I'd disagree, however, with that implied definition of education. How can education be separate from a concern about war, about pollution, about race, about poverty, about marijuana? Our students do care about jobs, but they also care about an economy and a system that can provide those jobs, they care about changes that will make inner cities decent places to live in, changes that promise safety and peace and honesty, not just in their own city but also in Saigon and Hanoi and Johannesburg and Peking. I quote that odd statement about junior college students, not because what the organizer says is important, but because his mistaken belief seems so widespread. Perhaps he, and the others who share his belief, think that students who can't spell "ecology" can't really care about contaminated water. It's true that a lot of our stu-

dents don't spell very well. A lot of them don't, and perhaps never will, put -ed's on the ends of their past tense verbs. Nevertheless, they have faith that education will do two things: qualify them for jobs that are their only way out of the ghetto, and also promote a way of thinking, a way of behaving, that may prove the only way out for all of us.

Junior colleges will prove really explosive if we don't justify that faith, if we don't live up to that promise. We are selling the students, and the community, short if we think of junior college education as merely a matter of learning to spell, as primarily a matter of shifting dialect, as exclusively a matter of learning to see the world from a $30,000 a year split-level viewpoint, with all that implies, rather than an under $3,000 a year share-the-bed-in-shifts viewpoint, with all that implies.

Two definitions of education, from widely disparate sources, are as true for our students as they are for students at Berkeley or Stanford. One definition says:

> ...the goal of the educational process is to create human beings who have human concerns; human beings who know and understand themselves and are able to pass judgment on what's going on around them. Education should not mold the mind according to a prefabricated architectural plan. It should rather liberate the mind...from established definitions and plans. The mind has to be liberated merely in order to perceive the world; to see the society; to understand what its advantages are, what its disadvantages are.

The second definition merely lists some of the characteristics an educated person should have. He is a person who

> Views problems in objective, realistic, and tolerant terms.
> Changes his opinion on controversial issues when an examination of the evidence and the arguments calls for revision of opinions previously held.
> Judges problems in terms of situations, issues, purposes, and consequences involved rather than in terms of fixed, dogmatic precepts or emotionally wishful thinking.

And in addition, he is a person who has "confidence in his ability to succeed."

Our students do want to be human beings capable of understanding themselves and their society. They want their minds liberated, and they think of college as a way of achieving these aims. They want to look at problems objectively and realistically, and they want, most of all, to develop confidence in their ability to do these things. Very few of them will phrase their hope in terms as clear or impressive as those used by Angela Davis or by Bloom's Taxonomy--they are more likely to say they want to learn to figure

stuff out better, or to stop feeling dumb about things--but what they are asking amounts to the same thing. Unless we commit ourselves to this kind of education for all students, not just the so-called "good" ones, we're really failing our students, we're really shattering that promise.

To honestly work toward these aims, rather than merely giving them lip service, we have to explode a lot of old ideas about what the student's role is, what our role is, and how we measure success in either role. It isn't easy.

First, we cannot regard our students as "low achievers." Probably there's no such animal as a "low-achieving student," although there are certainly some low achieving schools. The evidence is overwhelming that low achievers (or under-achievers, or remedial students, or culturally deprived students, or whatever current euphemism is used to conceal our scorn) are merely the victims of labels the system has pinned on them, usually very early in school. Labels cling. Labels influence attitudes and methods and learning. IQ scores are language based, and thus discriminatory, but the damage doesn't end there. When teachers are told that everyone in the class has been sectioned "high," the class does well; when teachers are told that the IQ of their section is pretty low, the outcome justifies the expectation, and the myth becomes the reality.

More criminal than teacher expectation, however, is that students tend to believe what they're told about themselves, and after 12 years of this kind of thing, they come to us labeled in their own minds. They think they're remedial. Before they or we can get anywhere, they must be shown that they can indeed succeed.

We can give them some of that needed confidence by really keeping one of the big promises--"accepting the students where they are." Accepting means more than letting them in--the famous open door--and then deriding them for their present shortcomings, pushing them out again with their worst self-doubts confirmed--the almost equally famous revolving door. Accepting means actively playing an"I'm OK, you're OK" role. We cannot treat our students as though they were children, nor can we behave childishly ourselves.

Probably, schools must continue to be language based--most of life is--but it doesn't have to be upper-middle-class-white-language based. And for far too many junior college students, for far too long, it has been. Unfortunately, our educational system has childishly insisted that first the students must "remedy" their language practices and then, only then, will we treat them as adults who have something worthwhile to say. Maybe you can convince a Vietnam veteran that he has to perfect his sentence structure before he can understand Slaughterhouse Five; maybe you can convince a streetwalker that she has to learn to spell before she can discuss Mrs. Warren's Profession, but I wouldn't want either of those attempts on my conscience or my permanent academic record.

We must change our old notions of the kind of language we will accept from students, and do our damnedest to understand what they are saying. But we must also change our notions of the kind of language we offer to students, and do our damnedest to make it possible for them to understand us. We must do both these things without condescension, without any fretting over so-called "standards"--we must do it completely naturally, as if we believe really that they're OK and we're OK too.

Because a lot of Ph.D.'s find it hard to consider these students OK as students--they're all right as people--community colleges, at least the kind I know, are not likely to give the Ph.D.'s much of a welcome. Our hiring committee will be polite about it: they'll tell the Ph.D. applicant that he's priced himself out of the very tight budget. The salary scale, based on amount of education and years of experience, is everywhere pretty rigidly observed. We cannot legally bargain over wages, nor can we pay less than the scale calls for. The part about salary is true enough--Ph.D.'s are just too expensive the year the levy fails--but there are also other, more valid, reasons for our not hiring them. For 15 years, at least, we've been reluctant to take Ph.D.'s, although most colleges have had a few--accreditation committees like them because they give the faculty list a little class. Experience has shown, however, that in good times most of them felt declassed by their presence at a junior college. They merely sat it out, and when there was an opening almost anyplace else, they rushed back to the more rarefied atmosphere of what they considered a "real college." Usually we rejoiced with them at their departure. But more important than their contemptuous attitude toward the junior college, perhaps even more important than the scorn they felt, and sometimes showed, for what they considered the stupidity of their students, was their own genuine inability to communicate. Ph.D.'s have been trained for years to talk fancy, and most of them won't stop, or can't stop, or don't want to, or, more charitably, believe that stopping would be a betrayal of the scholarly tradition they represent. Community college teachers, however, can't afford to pay homage to scholarly language when scholarly language doesn't communicate--communication is what we're about.

After all, much academia language is intended more to impress than to inform, to demonstrate that instructors are pretty highly educated professional types who deal in concepts inaccessible to people who can't follow involuted sentences and esoteric vocabulary. We must ignore the sneers of those who say simplifying the language distorts the concept. But anybody who has heard Buckley conduct a TV interview knows there are a good many more simple ideas masquerading in abstruse jargon than there are complex ideas damaged by simplification.

The term "standards" can become the rallying cry for some pretty repressive teaching. The standards most people defend with so much emotion are based on exclusiveness, are only mirrors of

their own backgrounds and their own linguistic habits. Good community colleges have stopped using these so-called standards as an excuse for not educating our students--as a way of making sure that the ins stay in and the outs stay out--of insuring, in other words that America remains socially and economically stratified. We've stopped trembling quite so much over what the university will say when students transfer--although we do warn our students that a good many university professors are linquistic snobs, and we give them some advice on what to do when they encounter that kind.

None of this means, of course, that good community colleges don't have standards. They do have them, but the standards are based more on "confidence in ability to succeed" than on built-in failure. They are based more on the creation of human beings who can judge problems fairly, and then change their convictions if they need to, than on semicolons, on rules and rote learning. They are based on acceptance and real achievement, not on pedanticism and rejection.

If there has been a change in community colleges in the last few years, and I think there has been, the change involves our altered notion of "standards." Fifteen years ago, when I first began teaching in a junior college, there was a good deal of worry about university parallel courses, and in their zeal to prove themselves at least as tough as the four-year colleges, some two-year schools made their requirements even tougher. A chance to try, for many students, just meant a chance to fail. The prevalent attitude now, I believe, is to hell with what the universities think; let them look to themselves.

Fifteen years ago, although most community colleges had vocational-technical divisions, English departments tended to see career students as a separate breed, a group that needed special courses to "bring them up" to the standards of the rest of us. We developed some sub courses and some sub-sub courses, and sometimes even some sub-sub-subs. That attitude is disappearing--it's gone in what I'd consider good schools. There's very little talk of tracking these days, and almost no talk about "terminal students." The vocational divisions used to tell us they didn't want their students in "regular composition;" it was too highfalutin, they said, and too hard, and their students needed something useful. The liberal arts people, on the other hand, wouldn't let their students into non-transfer English; it was too utilitarian, they said, too second-rate, and their students needed something liberalizing. For awhile we thought maybe we were doing it backwards--let's liberalize the technical students, we thought, and give the transfer students something useful--if we don't, who will? Nowadays, however, we've pretty much stopped this vocational segregation. Perceptive and intelligent reading, honest and sensible writing, is no different for dental technicians than it is for dentists; plumbers and sociologists take the same newspaper and fight the same polluted water. We've

stopped seeing ourselves as teaching a "skills" course, as being primarily a service department for either the liberal arts or the technical division. We see what we do as both liberalizing and useful in itself--and most of the students agree. Mortuary students and math students sit comfortably in the same classroom, and both learn more because both are there.

This shift in attitude has led to some shifts in procedure. When there is a choice of courses, each course is described as specifically as possible and the student himself, not the curriculum, is responsible for the choice. Once the choice is made, what the students write and say isn't "graded" at all--it's responded to, sometimes by the teacher, more often by the class. At the end of the term, students can't fail, although they can get "no credit" and try again. We'd like to give them simply "credit" or "no entry" but our tyrannical computer insists on letter grades. Until we can beat it into submission, the students grade themselves. Realistic evaluation of what they have accomplished, how much they have changed, is part of the subject matter of the course, a real part of "education."

The Guidelines for Training Two-Year College English Teachers, adopted last spring by the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and printed in the October, 1971 issue of CCCC Journal, came out of a conviction that we must train, and then hire, English teachers who sympathize with this definition of what junior college education is, can work toward realizing its aims, and will not feel demeaned by doing so. The Guidelines, about which we will hear more later, demand revolutionary changes in four-year and graduate schools, as well as in junior colleges.

The Guidelines recognize the racism and bias built into our training programs and try to eliminate some of it. They recommend that courses in minority literature, and in the nature of language, be basic requirements, not electives, just as many junior colleges are now insisting that Black literature and Black experience be a part of all courses, not just available for Black students who are interested.

The Guidelines do not, however, take any open stand on one of the issues of the seventies--the position of women. As faculty members, women are probably as well off in community colleges as in any segment of American public education. They are not over-represented, as they have been in elementary and secondary schools, so that junior college teaching becomes a "woman's job" and automatically second-rate. That rigid salary scale does not discriminate, so women are not paid less, as they are in many universities. Neither of the two districts I've taught in had any rule against husbands and wives, and both have had more than one pair. As one moves up the administrative ladder, of course, the proportion of females gets smaller, but they're still there-a division chairman or two, an assistant dean or two. It's more a matter of habit than policy, and the habit can be more easily changed, I think, in community colleges than in most other places.

The general climate, in my own college at least, is favorable to change. We've thrown out two composition texts this year--one because it didn't have enough Black material, and one because it offered a stereotyped and distorted view of women students. It's only fair to say, perhaps, that the faculty did the throwing out in both cases; the students made no protest. You can, in fact, get a good giggle from most of our students at the mention of Women's Lib. Hardly surprising, since most of our white students come from conventional lower middle-class backgrounds, and most of our Black students think the image of the Black male needs bolstering, the image of the dominant Black female needs playing down. So one of the course objectives, seldom specifically stated, is the elimination of that automatic giggle. We do have a composition course with women's emphasis, just as we have one with Black emphasis, but the students who take those courses are already converted. The greater need is for every course to question those cultural stereotypes, for every student to examine his assumptions. Junior colleges remain one of the best places to reach the unconverted--perhaps just because there are so many of them there--but more likely because these students come with a touching faith that education will change things for them--both their way of viewing the world, and the world they view.

Community colleges must continue to recruit students from unlikely and unpopular sources--from big city ghettoes, from rural cultural blight areas--the racial rejects, the dropouts and failures from flossy high schools. But unless we can explode some of our cherished traditional notions of what being educated means, of how being educated happens, those same students will be justified in making all the junior colleges across the country, but especially the inner city community colleges, explosive institutions in the dangerous sense of that word.

A long time ago, before I got to be a junior college English teacher, I was bookkeeper for a farm implement company, an outfit that sold all varieties of farm machinery. The favorite in-house joke, one I heard over and over again, was "John Deere stands behind every machine he makes, except the manure spreader." I can still see the joke, but I can also see that the statement might apply to education, too--we ought not to stand behind manure spreaders, of any sort.

Notes

1. The National Study of English in the Junior College, a Focus Report published by MLA ERIC Clearinghouse on the Teaching of English in Higher Education, 1969.

2. These statistics were gathered by Richard Friedrich, Chairman of the Forest Park Community College English Department, St. Louis, assisted by Lana Weinbach, Director of Research for the College.

3. David Jessup, western states organizer for Front-lash, as quoted in Newsweek, October 25, 1971, p. 38.

4. Angela Davis, in the Pauley Pavilion speech, October, 1968, as quoted in the AAUP Bulletin, Autumn, 1971, p. 410.

5. David R. Krathwohl, Benjamin S. Bloom, and Bertram B. Masia, Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook II: Affective Domain, New York: David McKay, 1964, pp. 167-8.